

great friend he is of our veterans because he is not.

All I am asking for is to give the VA the tools they need to be able to provide our veterans with the healthcare they have earned.

This isn't the first time I have been on the floor for a unanimous consent request with the Senator from Florida. But this is an excuse that doesn't hold water. I didn't see the Senator from Florida at the committee hearing. Even though he is not a member of the VA Committee, if he was so concerned about this person, why wasn't he at the committee hearing to hear the responses that Dr. Elnahal gave?

I am going to tell you what this is. With all due respect to the Senator from Florida, this is obstruction at the worst because this obstruction stops our veterans from getting the healthcare they need.

You want to talk about why the American people think the U.S. Senate is dysfunctional? The Senator from Florida could look in the mirror.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WARNOCK). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UKRAINE

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, at the end of April, I had the honor of traveling to Germany, Poland, and Lithuania to meet with American servicemembers and hear from high-level government officials on the state of democracy in Europe as Russia wages war against Ukraine. I returned to the United States with the reassurance that the commitment of our partners and allies to defending freedom and defeating tyranny has only grown stronger. I also returned with three important takeaways that I believe must be central in America's response to Russia's murderous invasion of Ukraine and must define our commitment to supporting our NATO allies and preserving democracy.

First, America and our freedom-loving partners across the world must renew our commitment to "never again," support the massive humanitarian efforts underway to aid Ukrainian refugees and those who are helping them, and forcefully condemn the genocide occurring at the direction of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine.

Let me say that again. First, America and our freedom-loving partners across the world must renew our commitment to "never again," support the massive humanitarian efforts underway to aid Ukrainian refugees and those who are helping them, and forcefully condemn the genocide occurring at the direction of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine.

In 2005, my wife, daughters, and I spent 2 days visiting the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum in Poland. Anyone who has had the opportunity to walk the grounds of that place will tell you how overwhelming it is to confront the horrors that occurred there. It is out of these horribly dark places that the phrase "never again" was born.

Following the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, the world pledged to never again allow genocide to take the lives of innocent people, but today, Putin is choosing that path.

When I returned to Poland last month, I had the solemn honor of participating in a Holocaust memorial ceremony alongside U.S. Ambassador to Poland Mark Brzezinski in what was formerly the Warsaw ghetto and laid a wreath there to honor the Jewish people who fought the Nazi occupation. I also visited a refugee center serving the thousands of Ukrainians forced from their homes and who have been welcomed with open arms by the Polish people.

During the ceremony and as I walked through the refugee center, my thoughts constantly turned to the atrocious attacks on Mariupol. The leveling of that city and the mass graves found there in Bucha cannot be ignored or dismissed as part of the war. These are crimes against humanity. Children are dying. Families are dying precisely because they are Ukrainian and won't do what the dictator Putin wants them to do. This is genocide.

World leaders promise "never again," but they are failing.

I thank God for the incredible hospitality of the Polish people to welcome these Ukrainian families. I am grateful, too, for what other European countries are doing to help them.

We must do everything in our power, using our voices, actions, and resources, to support these humanitarian missions and forcefully condemn Putin's genocide in Ukraine.

Second, we must continue to show full support to Ukraine and do everything in our power to help it win in this war. That includes approving delivery of the MiG-29 fighter jets that President Zelenskyy has been requesting for months.

President Biden's blockade of these aircraft is an act of weakness and makes no sense. If we want to prevent putting American men and women on the battlefield, we need to give Ukraine every military and intelligence resource it needs to fight and win this war. Most of our NATO allies agree with this, but Joe Biden insists on standing in the way and is actively helping Putin maintain dominance in the skies.

Vladimir Putin is a murderous thug. His unjust war intentionally targets civilians and has taken thousands of innocent lives. This is genocide.

The Ukrainians have shown that they are willing and able to fight this war themselves and can defeat Putin. We need to let them do it. When the war is

over, accountability must be demanded and secured. Putin and his thugs in Russia and Belarus must be tried for their crimes in a war tribunal. They should never see another day of freedom as long as they live.

Third and finally, we must recognize the importance of energy and industrial independence from tyrannical and genocidal regimes like Russia and communist China.

I have long advocated for American businesses to decouple their operations from communist China. In March, I appealed directly to American business leaders and urged them in an open letter to begin the process of cutting ties with communist China and our dependence on its supply chain and realign American businesses with U.S. values.

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine shows exactly why decoupling from evil regimes is so important, and Europe now understands this better than anyone else. That is why we should applaud businesses that have taken steps to end their relationships with these regimes and applaud nations like Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, which have taken aggressive action to end their reliance on Russian energy.

Lithuania has also boldly stood up to communist China and supported Taiwan. Their bravery is exemplary and deserves our support.

These nations are the exception to the rule in Europe, but their leadership in forming partnerships with democratic neighbors like Norway has proven critical to freeing them from the Kremlin's threats of withholding resources.

To protect democracy and sovereignty from the influence of evil leaders like Putin and Xi, we must commit to preferring to do business with fellow democratic governments as much as possible. That is why I have been demanding that Biden take immediate steps to put America back on the path to energy independence, stop his appeasement policies with the world's dictators, and end all trade talks with Venezuela and other evil regimes.

I recently secured a commitment from Energy Secretary Granholm that the United States would not import any oil from Venezuela or Iran. She said so in an open and public hearing in the Senate Armed Services Committee. President Biden needs to publicly reaffirm that commitment.

Our attitude should always be America first, but if it can't be made in America, it must be made by a democratic partner or at the very least one who seeks mutual benefit with us instead of our downfall.

Decoupling from Russia and communist China and other tyrannical regimes will not be easy for many businesses or governments, America included. This move won't occur overnight, but it is absolutely necessary as these despots advance their plans for world domination and continue to carry out assaults on sovereignty and democracy in Europe and Asia, as well

as support dictators in Latin America like Maduro, Ortega, and the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime. If America and our freedom-loving partners are going to truly stand for democracy, we cannot do so while lining the pockets of those who seek to actively destroy liberty and independence wherever it exists.

Whether we like it or not, we need to recognize the evil in our world. It exists in the Governments of communist China, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Russia. They want a different world, one where the enemies of democracy, human rights, and sovereign nations issue the orders and the United States and our allies do what we are told. They will bully and crush anyone in their way if they are allowed. I, for one—and I know I am not alone—will not accept this.

Out of this terrible conflict, America has an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the security and independence of democratic nations, strengthen our energy and industrial independence and partnerships with fellow democracies, and stop genocide, renewing the promise of “never again.” We cannot allow this moment to pass without creating this need to change. The survival of democracy and the United States depends on it.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTING

Mr. Kaine. Mr. President, I rise to just share candid emotions about yesterday's tragic shooting of schoolchildren who were 2 days from the end of the school year in Texas—19 deaths of little ones and 2 teachers and others injured. This is rough. I don't have any notes because I am really emotional about it. These shootings kind of give me PTSD, I have to admit.

I was the mayor of Richmond, and our city had the second highest homicide rate in the United States. At a much younger period of my life, I found myself going to too many funerals, to too many wakes, to maybe the most memorable crime scenes, then also to homicide victims' family support group meetings in church basements in my city.

Then I got to be the Governor of Virginia. In April of 2007, my wife and I landed in Japan while leading a trade mission, and we went to a hotel and immediately got a phone call saying that there was a shooting underway on the campus of Virginia Tech University and that I should turn on CNN, which I did, in Japan.

As I saw the events unfold, I said: Take us right back to the airport.

We had flown 14 hours. We were in the hotel for about an hour but went right back to the airport and flew all the way back home to what was the worst day of my life in trying to comfort 32 family members who had lost kids or their spouses who were faculty members—and that process went on for years—in the days right after the horrible tragedy but then commissioning a

study about what went wrong and then trying to find an appropriate settlement with these families that would honor their loved ones.

I had to deal with State police officers—hardened, hardened law enforcement veterans—who walked into the classrooms at Virginia Tech, to find carnage and on each body a cell phone ringing because a parent had seen it on television and wanted to call to make sure it wasn't one of their children who had been killed. My law enforcement officers talked about how those rings that would never be answered just haunted them, haunted them.

So when there are these shootings at a school, at a nightclub, at a concert, in a grocery store, in a church, in a synagogue, I feel like I am back in April of 2007, experiencing those emotions for the first time.

I was analyzing my own emotions for the first time last night. Why have I not been able to reach a point of more—I don't know—emotional equilibrium about this after 15 years? I realized that the reason was that my emotional reaction that is kind of a PTSD thing is not just because of the shootings, not just because of the deaths, not just because of the promising lives cut short; it is compounded by a realization that, here in this body, we have done nothing.

It would be bad enough to experience the violence and be reminded of that most painful time in my life, but to experience it as a U.S. Senator, as a Member of a body, and to say, “Well, what have we done? We didn't do anything at the Federal level after Virginia Tech, and we didn't do anything after Pulse, and we didn't do anything after Las Vegas, and we didn't do anything after Sandy Hook, and we didn't do anything after one tragedy after the next,” then that compounds in some ways, and that is the thing that makes the emotional reaction a reaction that is as fresh today as it was in April of 2007. It is a wound that can't heal until we do something to heal the injury, to heal the problem.

I was thinking about this last night, and I was trying to, you know, think, what is some wisdom that I can derive to make me feel less down and less despondent? And I just thought of two things that I wanted to share. One is a spiritual insight, and the other is a practical reason not to lose hope.

So, as a spiritual insight, a few years ago, Pope Francis was kicking off a yearlong effort to encourage the revitalization of parish life—not the life of the big, universal church but the life of parishes. He challenged parishes, but this challenge could go for people, and it certainly could go for political leaders. He challenged parishes to be (statement made in Spanish) “islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference,” and I thought, what an interesting challenge.

The thing about that challenge that I thought was so beautiful and a little bit unexpected is he didn't counterpose

mercy to evil or mercy to cruelty or mercy to hatred; he contrasted mercy with indifference—with indifference.

There is evil in the world, and there is hatred in the world, and there is cruelty in the world. Yet usually those forces are not strong enough to succeed for very long unless—unless—there is widespread indifference. We are challenged not to be indifferent.

If we assess why the Senate, this great deliberative body, has been unwilling to act for 15 years, I don't think it is cruelty or evil; it is indifference. It is the very thing that Pope Francis was warning us to avoid.

We should be merciful. We should not be indifferent. Evil doesn't thrive for very long absent indifference. Yet, despite what we often say after tragedies like this, with our thoughts and our prayers and our sincere emotions, if we don't demonstrate by more than just words that we are touched by these tragedies, then we are committing the sin of indifference.

I hope very much that the tragedy of these little children's deaths may push us out of the indifference that we have been sunk in at least on this issue. I really hope that it will.

Then, finally, there is a practical reason I am not going to give up hope that it will. I mentioned that I was the mayor of Richmond, dealing with a homicide problem, and that I was the Governor during what was at the time the worst mass shooting in the history of the United States. Sadly, it has been eclipsed. The Virginia Tech shooting is no longer the most tragic shooting in history. Others have eclipsed it in terms of the numbers of those killed.

I felt that same despair then, and I threw myself into trying to make changes. I made the changes in the Virginia laws that I could make as the Governor by executive action, but there are some things I couldn't do by executive action. I needed the support of my legislature to do a comprehensive background check bill because, in the case of the Virginia Tech shooting, Seung-Hui Cho, the disturbed 19-year-old who committed that crime, was legally barred from owning a weapon, but weaknesses in the background check system didn't catch that, and he was able to get the weapons that led to that carnage.

I couldn't get my legislature, even in the aftermath of the worst shooting in the history of the United States, to be willing to take action, but we never gave up. We kept pushing. We kept pushing in Virginia, the headquarters' State of the National Rifle Association. We kept pushing and pushing and pushing, and in 2019, 12 years after the tragedy at Virginia Tech, my legislature passed a set of commonsense gun safety rules: one handgun a month, a ban on certain kinds of weapons that nobody needs, a comprehensive background check, mental health support—a series of initiatives. My legislature did pass it in 2019, and my State is safer as a result, but 12 years was a